

Message Text

SECRET

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ACTION SS-25

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AMEMBASSY CAIRO IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY JIDDA IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY LONDON IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY PARIS IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV IMMEDIATE

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM IMMEDIATE

USMISSION USUN NEW YORK IMMEDIATE

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AMEMBASSY ROME IMMEDIATE

S E C R E T BEIRUT 4087

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, SY, LE, IS, JO, EG, UK, IT, FR, SA, KU, MILI

SUBJ: LEBANON: SYRIAN INTENTIONS

REF: STATE 182460

1. WE BELIEVE THAT SYRIANS ARE NOT LOOKING FOR A MAJOR CONFRONTATION AT MOMENT. THEY HAVE EXERCISED CONSIDERABLE RESTRAINT IN FACE OF CONTINUED PROVOCATIONS BY CHRISTIANS. ACCORDING TO DOCTORS AT BARBIR HOSPITAL, AND LAF COMMANDER GENERAL KHOURY, THERE ARE AT LEAST FIVE TO SIX SYRIAN MILITARY CASUALTIES DAILY.

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2. SYRIANS SEEM ALSO TO BE TRYING TO DIVERT CONFLICT WITH PHALANGE AND NLP TO POLITICAL RATHER THAN MILITARY ARENA. MEETING IN ZGHORTA ON JULY 15 BETWEEN WALID JUMBLATT, ABDULLAH SA'DAH AND SULAYMAN FRANJIYAH WAS CERTAINLY WITH BLESSING IF NOT SPONSORSHIP OF SYRIANS. ALTHOUGH, ACCORDING TO SA'DAH, MEETING DID NOT YET RESULT IN FORMATION OF FORMAL POLITICAL ALLIANCE, SYRIANS DOUBTLESS SEE RAPPROCHEMENT AMONG THESE

LEADERS AS WAY OF HELPING TO ISOLATE POLITICALLY PHALANGE
AND NLP.

3. AT SAME TIME, WE DO NOT BELIEVE THAT SYRIANS WILL CONTINUE
TO TAKE CHRISTIAN PROVOCATIONS ENDLESSLY AND FEAR THAT THEY
MAY REACT EVEN MORE VIOLENTLY THAN DURING LAST ROUND. MORE-
OVER, WE THINK THAT SYRIANS REMAIN DETERMINED ULTIMATELY TO
SUBDUE PHALANGE AND NLP.

4. ACCORDING TO KHOURY, SYRIANS ARE UNWILLING TO TURN OVER
COMPLETELY SECURITY RESPONSIBILITIES IN EAST BEIRUT TO LEBANESE
ARMY OR TO ABANDON SYRIAN PRESENCE IN AREA. ASIM QANSUH, HEAD
OF THE LOCAL BATH PARTY, TOLD EMBOFF ON JULY 13 THAT THE
SYRIANS WOULD NOT REFRAIN FOREVER FROM RESPONDING TO CHRISTIAN
PROVOCATIONS, AND THAT WHEN THEY RESPONDED, THEY WOULD DO SO
EVEN MORE VIOLENTLY THAN LAST TIME (SEE BEIRUT 3916). HE ADDED
THAT SYRIANS "WANTED THE HEADS OF CAMILLE CHAMOUN AND PIERRE
GEMAYEL." SHAFIQ WAZZAN, SPOKESMAN FOR THE CONSERVATIVE
ISLAMIC COUNCIL, TOLD EMBOFF JULY 11 THAT IF PROVOCATIONS
CONTINUED, SYRIAN ARMY OFFICERS WOULD DEMAND RETALIATION AND
THAT ASSAD WOULD HAVE TO LISTEN TO THEM OR RISK BEING OVER-
THROWN (SEE BEIRUT 3851). ADF "COMMANDER" SAMI KHATIB TOLD
EMBOFFS ON JULY 9 THAT SYRIANS COULD NOT AFFORD TO LOSE IN
EAST BEIRUT: "IF ASSAD FALLS IN ASHRAFIYAH, HE WILL FALL IN
DAMASCUS" (SEE BEIRUT 3840).

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5. AMBASSADOR'S COMMENTS: I AGREE WITH ABOVE ANALYSIS. I
ALSO DO NOT THINK SARKIS' SENSITIVITY TO SYRIAN REACTION LAY
BEHIND HIS REMARKS TO ME. RATHER, IT HAS BEEN INCREASINGLY
CLEAR DURING PAST WEEK THAT IN SARKIS' VIEW RESPONSIBILITY FOR
TROUBLE LIES LARGELY WITH MARONITE MILITANTS, WHO CONTINUE
MAKE INFLAMMATORY STATEMENTS AND ENGAGE IN PROVOCATIONS, RATHER
THAN COOPERATING IN COOLING DOWN SITUATION. HE ALSO BELIEVES
THEY STARTED THE TROUBLE. (I THINK SARKIS GAVE SYRIANS ORDERS
TO SUPPRESS FIRING IN EAST BEIRUT ON JULY 1, BUT HAD NO IDEA
THEY WOULD OVER-REACT AS THEY DID. THIS APPARENTLY LAY HEAVY
ON HIS CONSCIENCE AND WAS ONE OF REASONS HE THREATENED TO QUIT.)
HE HAS MADE IT CLEAR ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS THAT HE COULD NOT
EXPECT SYRIANS TO STAND STILL IN FACE OF CONTINUED PROVOCATIONS
AND THAT FAULT FOR CONTINUED TROUBLE WITH THEM LAY LARGELY
WITH MARONITES AND WITH BACHIR GEMAYEL IN PARTICULAR.

6. HAVING SAID ABOVE, I MUST ADMIT TO BEING INTRIGUED MYSELF
BY HIS REMARKS ON JULY 18 TO EFFECT THAT PROBLEM WAS MILITIAS,
NOT SYRIANS, BECAUSE I HAD HAD IMPRESSION SYRIANS WERE BEING
DIFFICULT. GENERAL KHOURY'S REMARKS REPORTED ABOVE WOULD
SUPPORT THIS CONTENTION AND SARKIS MAY HAVE BEEN OVER-OPTIMISTIC.
NEVERTHELESS, I THINK WE CAN SAY QUITE FIRMLY TO ALL THAT WE

BELIEVE SYRIANS WILL CONTINUE SHOW RESTRAINT UP TO A POINT,
BUT THAT CONTINUED PROVOCATIONS BY MILITIAS WILL EVENTUALLY
LEAD TO ANOTHER ROUND OF WERIOUS FIGHTING. IF MILITIAS DO NOT
ACT RESPONSIBLY, THEY WILL HAVE NO ONE TO BLAME BUT THEM-
SLEVES FOR DESTRUCTION OF LEBANON. AT ALL ODDS, WE MUST MAKE
IT CLEAR TO ALL THAT WEL WILL NOT REPEAT NOT SUPPORT MILITIA
INTRANSIGENCE AND THAT WE WILL DISCOURAGE ISRAELIS FROM DOING
SO. I HOPE VICE PRESIDENT CAN CONVEY THIS MESSAGE CLEARLY TO
BASIL. WE MUST DISABUSE MARONITES OF IDEA WE WILL COME TO THEIR
RESCUE. THEY CONTINUE TO NOURISH THAT ILLUSION.
PARKER

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NNN

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